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Senator Cannon

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MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable
James R. Schlesinger

Our analysts have noted a change in Soviet handling of Watergate over the last week or so. Attached is a memorandum summarizing the developments. I am sending copies of this memorandum only to you and Secretary Kissinger.

W. E. Colby
Director

Attachment: Detente and the President's Position: The View From Moscow

20 APR 1974
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April 20, 1974

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Detente and the President's Position: The View From Moscow

The Soviets are beginning to provide more details in public on the scope and seriousness of President Nixon's domestic difficulties. They are also beginning to suggest that the President's problems could affect US-Soviet relations, including the US and Soviet bargaining positions at the forthcoming summit. Moscow is nonetheless maintaining its public display of strong support for the President and continues to signal its backing for him in his present situation.

The Soviets have believed since the outset of the Watergate affair that it was being used by the President's political opposition to get him. As the President's difficulties have grown, so have Moscow's suspicions. Now the Soviets profess to see the "enemies of detente" behind the President's problems. These conspirators have joined ranks with other political opportunists to form what one public lecturer in Moscow recently called an "ill-intentioned coalition," with the objective of overturning the President and detente with the USSR. Evidently this interpretation of the Watergate affair is believed by some in the Kremlin hierarchy. Several weeks ago, Yury Arbatov told Ambassador Stoessel that in his briefings on the Washington situation, he has encountered a tendency among the Soviet leaders to explain Watergate as an anti-Soviet plot.

Despite Moscow's concern about the nature of the forces arrayed against the President, the Soviets have, until very recently, tended to play down the strength of the President's opposition. The line, both publicly and privately, has been that the President was far stronger than his enemies and would

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surmount his difficulties with detente intact. Lately, however, the Soviets have begun to imply that the President's problems are greater than they initially surmised, and that detente as well as the President may be in jeopardy.

Two public lecturers, one in Leningrad and the other in Moscow, recently described the President's situation as very serious. As supporting evidence, they cited the President's drop in US polls, his tax problems, and the trials of former aides. The Leningrad lecturer went a step further, specifically raising the impeachment possibility and asserting that US-Soviet relations were tangled in the President's current predicament. He also cited Western press reports to the effect that the President needs a strong showing in the international arena to offset his domestic problems.

As the Soviets have become more concerned about the President's political situation, they have shown increased interest in what it means for Soviet policy toward the US. For example, a Soviet journalist recently asked a prominent US academician whether it might not be best to hold off with detente for the time being. Last week, Gromyko told Communist Party [redacted] that Moscow intends to pursue detente with the US, but it is not going to be "taken for a ride." Gromyko indicated that Moscow has confidence in the President and Secretary Kissinger, but that the Kremlin is going to pursue a tougher policy toward the US to show such "right-wing hardliners" as Senator Jackson that they cannot dictate Soviet policy.

The Soviets doubtless calculated that the substance of the Gromyko [redacted] talk would reach the US Administration. If so, the message that Moscow evidently wanted to convey was that the Soviets could not be expected to pull the President's chestnuts out of the fire, and that further progress in relations now depends on Washington's actions. Of course, this may be no more than pre-summit posturing,

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i.e., Moscow's way of saying that the advantage lies with the USSR, and that Washington cannot use the President's problems as a way of wheedling more out of the Soviet Union.

There have been other signs of a toughened Soviet attitude in dealings with the US. Moscow's decision to reduce the pace of Jewish emigration since the beginning of this year is the most important. Moreover, Moscow's claim that exit applications have decreased by 50 percent since January as compared with the same month last year suggests that it is making a rationale for further substantial reductions in emigration between now and the end of the year. There have also been some signs of a de-emphasis in Soviet propaganda on the value of bilateral relations with the US.

Brezhnev himself has a personal stake in detente and in cultivating relations with the US. Late last month, three staff members of the Soviet foreign press service told [redacted] that elements of the Soviet "military-industrial complex" who are disenchanted with detente and concerned about recent foreign policy setbacks would use a Nixon impeachment to try to oust party leader Brezhnev.

This is clearly overdrawn, but it illustrates that insofar as detente is thought to be in trouble, then Brezhnev himself is under some pressure to demonstrate either that it is not so, or that he is moving to adjust Soviet policy interests to changing circumstances. Since it is becoming harder for the Soviets to argue that the President and detente are not in some difficulty, then Brezhnev is forced toward the latter option. While finding it necessary to appear tougher, he may hope that he can talk and act tough enough to protect his domestic flanks without doing any serious damage to US-Soviet relations or the essentials of detente.

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